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First record of Lapland Longspur *Calcarius lapponicus* in the Caribbean

by Orestes Martínez, Lazaro Cotayo, Arturo Kirkconnell & James W. Wiley

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On 26 May 2016, J. Lezcano, a fishing guide from La Salina, Cuba, observed an unknown bird at Laguna de las Salinas ('Las Salinas', 22°07'42"N, 81°16'04"W; Fig. 1), c.3 km north-east of La Salina, Parque Nacional de Ciénaga de Zapata, Matanzas province, Cuba. Lezcano told F. Rodríguez about the bird, whereupon Rodríguez visited the site, and observed and photographed it for an extended period. Later the same day, Rodríguez told OM of the bird, and at 09.00 h, on 27 May 2016, OM was able to photograph and video it, an adult male Lapland Longspur *Calcarius lapponicus* in breeding plumage (Fig. 2). It was in the same area as the previous day, on the causeway dividing aquatic habitat and mangrove forest on either side. The substrate used by the longspur included sand, pebbles, rocks and grassy habitat adjacent to red *Rhizophora mangle* and black *Avicennia germinans* mangroves extending into the wetlands.

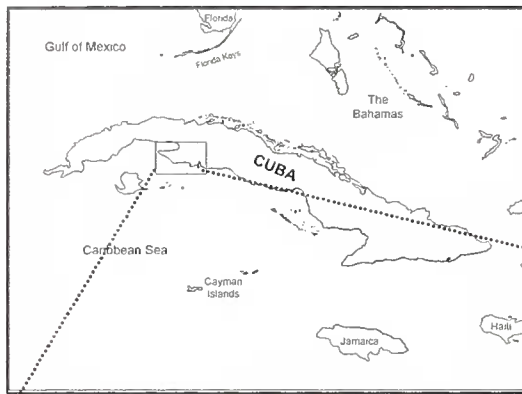
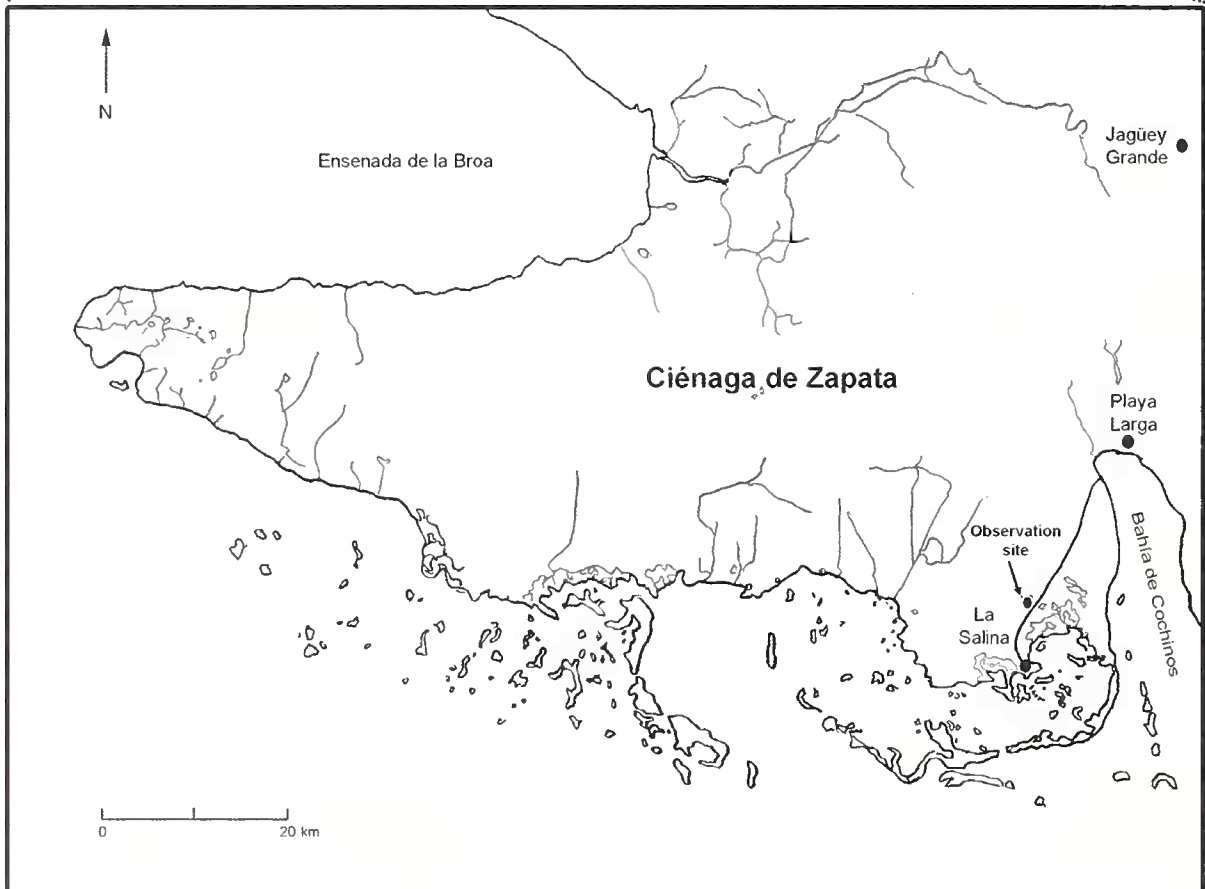


Figure 1. Zapata Peninsula, Ciénaga de Zapata, Matanzas province, Cuba, showing location of Lapland Longspur *Calcarius lapponicus* at Laguna de las Salinas, May 2016. Smaller map (above) shows location within larger map of the peninsula.



OM watched the longspur for *c.*90 minutes, during which time it was constantly foraging on sand among Virginia glasswort *Salicornia depressa*, between pebbles, and probing pock holes in larger rocks, apparently taking seeds and small invertebrates. The bird foraged alone, although a group of Ruddy Turnstones *Arenaria interpres* fed 6 m away. The longspur exhibited no evidence of exhaustion and was in complete plumage (Fig. 2). It did not vocalise.

Lapland Longspur breeds over an extensive Holarctic range across northern Eurasia and North America (Hussell & Montgomerie 2002). In North America, it winters at high densities west of the Great Lakes and across the Great Plains from southern Canada to northern Texas, but is generally uncommon west of the Rockies and in eastern North America south to northern (casually southern) Florida (Root 1988, Sauer *et al.* 1996, AOU 1998, Hussell & Montgomerie 2002). Southward migration of North American populations occurs between mid August and mid November (mainly early September to



Figure 2. Male Lapland Longspur *Calcarius lapponicus* in breeding plumage, Laguna de las Salinas, Zapata Peninsula, Matanzas province, Cuba, 27 May 2016 (Orestes Martínez)

Figure 3. Lapland Longspur *Calcarius lapponicus*, foraging in two substrates at Laguna de las Salinas, Cuba, 27 May 2016, (A) rubble and pebble surface on sand, (B) probing pock-holes in rocks over sand among Virginia glasswort *Salicornia depressa* and sea grape *Coccoloba uvifera* leaf litter (Orestes Martínez)

early November). On northbound migration, Lapland Longspur leaves its North American wintering range from early February to early March, moving through the northern USA and southern Canada during late March to early May, arriving on the breeding grounds in late May and early June (Hussell & Montgomerie 2002, Rising 2011). Peak arrival is 14–22 May (Madsen 1982).

Lapland Longspur is considered a vagrant to Mexico (Howell & Webb 1995) and casual on Bermuda (AOU 1998). Our search of eBird (2016) revealed no specific record for the Bahamas or West Indies, thus the observation reported here apparently is the first record of Lapland Longspur for the Caribbean.

The southernmost report of the species is from central Veracruz, Mexico, in February 1985 (Howell & Webb 1995), c.1,580 km west of the Cuban record. On 6 November 1974, Lee (1978) found a recently dead adult male in winter plumage 5.3 km east of Celestún, Yucatán (20°52'N, 90°24'W), c.940 km west of Las Salinas. The nearest reports we found of Lapland Longspur to Las Salinas are three from south Florida: (1) a single 'probable female' photographed on 13 March 2014 at Virginia Key Ecosystem Restoration Area, Miami-Dade County, by R. Diaz (eBird 2016; checklist S17533765); (2) R. Diaz (eBird 2016; checklist S17533765) noted that S. Pimm and S. Bass observed a female on Garden Key (c.24°37'42"N, 82°52'23"W), Dry Tortugas, Monroe County, on 11 March 2014; and (3) a male photographed on Garden Key by J. Roth (*in litt.* 2016) on 28 May 2016; i.e., one day after the male at Las Salinas was last seen. Judging by its plumage characteristics, the male on Garden Key on 28 May was not the same individual as at Las Salinas (J. Roth *in litt.* 2016; pers. obs.). Las Salinas is c.415 km south-west of Virginia Key and 300 km south-east of Garden Key.

During spring and autumn migration, Lapland Longspur shuns forest and uses ploughed fields, stubble and open grassland (AOU 1998, Hussell & Montgomerie 2002). In forested regions, it tends to concentrate along coasts, shores of lakes and rivers, roadsides and other open ground away from trees (Hussell & Montgomerie 2002), i.e., similar to the habitat used by the Cuban bird. Gabrielson (1924) reported that Lapland Longspur feeds mainly on seeds of grasses and other plants during late autumn to spring, but during summer and early autumn it feeds on a mix of seeds and invertebrates, similar to the Las Salinas bird.

Calcarius lapponicus has four or five recognised, but not well-differentiated, subspecies (Rising 2011, Dickinson & Christidis 2014). The Cuban bird cannot be identified subspecifically with certainty, although it appears closest to *C. l. subcalcaratus*, which is not always recognised (Rising 2011). We are unable to suggest any special conditions that would have influenced the Lapland Longspur's reaching Cuba. The country was not affected by any substantial weather front forming to the north and pushing south into the Antilles in the week before the bird was observed at Las Salinas. The only important weather system that affected Cuba in the weeks before was Tropical Depression Bonnie, which formed in the Atlantic, brushed past south-east Cuba and continued offshore towards the eastern USA coast during the week of 23 May 2016.

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The valid name of the Slaty-backed Flycatcher (previously, *sordida* Godwin-Austen, 1874, and *hodgsonii* J. P. Verreaux, 1871), and the gender of *Caffrornis*: comments on Zuccon (2011)

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In their study of members and relatives of *Ficedula* flycatchers, Outlaw & Voelker (2006) considered that genus *Muscicapella* Bianchi, 1907, which had been subsumed in *Niltava* Hodgson, 1837, by Watson (1986), but retained by other authors (e.g. Dickinson 2003, Clement 2006), should be placed within a broad genus *Ficedula* Brisson, 1760. As a result, *Nemura hodgsoni* [not *hodgsonii*], introduced by Moore, 1854 (*in* Horsfield & Moore 1854: 300), and the only species in *Muscicapella*, competes for precedence in *Ficedula* with *Siphia hodgsonii* (Slaty-backed Flycatcher), introduced by Verreaux ('1870' = 1871: 34). Verreaux's name, which was subsequently often misspelled '*hodgsoni*', is therefore a junior homonym under Art. 58.14 of the *International code of zoological nomenclature* (ICZN 1999), hereafter the Code, and requires reconsideration.

As set out by Watson (1986: 340), alternatives are available, as two new names had been coined for precisely the above eventuality: *Muscicapa amabilis* Deignan, 1947, and *Muscicapa erwini* Wolters, 1950, both *nomina nova* for *Siphia hodgsonii* J. P. Verreaux. Watson (1986: 339) also listed *Siphia erithacus* Jerdon & Blyth, 1861, as an applicable name, prior to Verreaux's *hodgsonii*, but did not use it because he (p. 340) considered it to be preoccupied by *Siphia erythaca* Blyth, 1847. Outlaw & Voelker (2006), apparently seeing no clear homonymy between *erithacus* and *erythaca*, suggested that *erithacus* should be applied to the Slaty-backed Flycatcher. However, Zuccon (2011) stated that this did not appear to be correct.

Zuccon (2011) argued that *Siphia erithacus* Jerdon & Blyth, 1861 (*in* Blyth 1861: 201) is preoccupied by *Siphia erythaca* 'Jerdon' [= Blyth] (1847: 126), because they differ only in the use of *i* or *y* according to Art. 58.2 of the Code, and thus represent variant spellings. He added that the two names are primary homonyms (Art. 53.3.1) and that *Siphia erithacus* Jerdon & Blyth, 1861, is invalid and unavailable. Zuccon then indicated that *Erythrosterina sordida*, introduced by Godwin-Austen (1874: 158), is the next available and valid name for Slaty-backed Flycatcher.